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J. Alfred P. B. and

A CANADIAN IN NEW YORK.

BY ELGIN MYERS, Q.C.

A SHORT sojourn in New York in the summer of 1891, where I was the recipient of much disinterested kindness at the hands of Mr. Erastus Wiman, so increased the interest that had previously been aroused in me by the accounts in the public prints of his achievements in the business, political and literary world, that now that his financial fame has become somewhat dimmed, I feel a desire that his countrymen should have at least some faint insight into the character of a



ERASTUS WIMAN.

man who for so long a period has occupied the attention of the people of this continent, even though that information be imparted by one so incapable of adequately performing the pleasing task as myself. The radical difference of opinion that exists between us on the subject of this country's future should, in my opinion, form no bar to the attempt to do justice to one who has so unselfishly

and at such great sacrifices of time and money, labored to promote the interests of the land of his birth. It should be of interest to Canadians to study the development of one of their own countrymen, who, friendless and alone, without the prestige of family connection or social influence, and aided only by his sturdy independence of character, unusual capacity, and stubborn perseverance, arose from the position of a friendless lad earning a mere pittance as a farm laborer, to the commanding eminence of one of the leaders of the business, political and literary world of the continent.

It is in the hope that a short narrative of the incidents of that career will prove a stimulus to those who are about setting out to buffet the waves of the world, with possibly neither friendship nor capital other than their own individual merits and a determination to succeed, as well as in the hope that that narrative will bring nearer home to the Canadian people the life of one of their own countrymen who has gained distinction in a foreign land and who has been so misrepresented and misunderstood, that I have essayed this task. It is not within the province of this article to account for the recent eclipse of Mr. Wiman's star of fortune, nor to investigate its causes, whether they be founded on wrong business methods or miscalculation, or whether, as is more probable, his fortunes have been engulfed in the whirlwind of financial disaster that seems at present to be invading so much of the earth's surface. Suffice it for the present in this connection to simply reproduce the following portion of an article from a newspaper published in Staten Island,

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which has for many years been his home:—"From real estate, stock in Rapid Transit and Electric Power companies, there seems ample assets belonging to Mr. Wiman's estate to pay all the indebtednesses in full, while behind it all is the energy, the ability and great force of ambition of one who fought in their home the Vanderbilts and their satellites and beat them all."

Of incidents in his career there is no lack. His life has been so active and so interwoven with that of the people, of all classes, that his biographer will not be troubled to find them, but will be perplexed by an embarrassment of riches. The great difficulty in preparing this article was to select from the great mass of facts, anything like a detailed relation of which would fill several volumes, those that might be deemed the most characteristic and at the same time, would not swell to an undue compass a magazine article. To the casual observer the most striking feature of Mr. Wiman's character, in view of the vastness and absorbing nature of his business enterprises, is his sentiment and imagination, two qualities that seem to be essential to that attribute in man that is generally termed greatness, but which are plants of so tender a growth that they have been crushed out of many men by the pressure of business pursuits, that, in many instances, have not been of so engrossing a nature as those that engaged Mr. Wiman's attention.

The youth, personal habits, religious beliefs and domestic life of a man of mark are always subjects of deep interest, the narration of which, as light streaks tend to relieve a darkened firmament, incline to brighten the heavy narration of the more weighty affairs of life. Beginning with his youth we find this erstwhile millionaire, at the age of twelve years, working as a farm laborer in the neighborhood of Churchville, near Brampton, in Peel County, a few miles west of Toronto, for the pittance of

fifty cents per week. We next find him for four or five years employed as a newsboy and then as a typesetter in the newspaper office of his cousin, the Honorable Wm. McDougall, who conducted the celebrated "North American," which, after enjoying a short but successful career under its brilliant manager and editor, became extinct. Here young Wiman worked from ten to sixteen hours per day at wages commencing at \$1.50 per week and ending at \$5.00.

A reminiscence of his newsboy career was forcibly and pleasantly recalled in London a year or two ago when dining as a guest of Lord and Lady Thurlow. The latter, during the course of conversation, remarked that she too was a Canadian. Upon Mr. Wiman asking whose daughter she was, he was informed that she was Lord Elgin's. "Oh," replied Mr. Wiman, "I remember now, your birthday was on a New Year's day, and I heard your first cry." Curious to know how this could be, Mr. Wiman explained to Lady Thurlow that he was the newsboy who delivered the papers about forty-five years before at Elmslie Villa, which was situated just beyond Yonge street entrance to College Avenue, Toronto, where Lord Elgin, then Governor-General of Canada, resided. The house was a great distance from the street, and on this particular morning the snow was deep, and no track having been made, the newsboy, not large of stature, whilst beating his way through it became covered with snow. The weather was bitterly cold, and the kindly butler taking him into the hall before the large stove let him warm himself. The house, between the bustling of the servants and doctors, was in great confusion. Suddenly the vigorous cry of an infant heard through the door, and the butler exclaiming, "Thank God it is over," revealed to our newsboy friend that the future Lady Thurlow was born.

In passing, we may remark, that it is a comment on the small size to

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pervasive democracy, that the newsboy
forty-five years later was, 3,000 miles
away, the honored guest of this titled
babe. The gold sovereign that Lord
Elgin conferred on our friend was the
first he ever possessed, and the joy it
bestowed caused the naturally warm
heart of Mr. Wiman to go out in gen-
erous contributions to the newsboys as
regularly as succeeding New Year's
came round.

These sums, as well as the farm
wages, small as they were, were
freely and regularly handed to a
widowed mother to be applied to the
common support of herself and a little
sister, who divided between them the
solicitude of the noble son and bro-
ther. Let it be said here that deep
affection and never failing care for this
widowed mother were among the
strongest features of Mr. Wiman's
character. Several citizens of Toronto,
some of whom have occupied, and
others of whom now occupy, positions
of trust and honor, take pleasure in
testifying, as indeed they also do to
all the incidents of his Canadian life
that are recorded here, to the noble
self-sacrifices on the part of Mr. Wiman,
in his earlier struggles for existence, to
not merely support, but render com-
fortable and happy, his widowed
mother, thus testifying to the posses-
sion of one of those human qualities
that approach nearest to the Divine,—
that of never failing filial love. It is
needless to say that this anxious so-
licitude accompanied the mother
through life, the need of support in-
creasing with the capacity to contri-
bute it, until death finally closed the
eyes of one, who, while taking a last
loving look upon her devoted son, pro-
phetically foresaw that he would attain
the eminence of what the world calls
success.

From the many incidents that could
be selected of absorbing interest at the
newsboy period of his career, is one
which also illustrates the narrowness

of his circumstances. When young
Wiman lost his week's wage of \$5.00,
rather than permit those who were
dependent upon him to suffer from
want, his filial and brotherly love
prompted him to borrow from his co-
workers in the office a sufficient sum
to tide over the week, a sum which it
is needless to say was speedily repaid
out of the savings of future earnings.

The next we see of young Wiman
is on the staff of the *Toronto Globe*, as
commercial editor, where his keen com-
mercial instincts soon became so mani-
fest that they attracted the attention
of Mr. R. G. Dun, who had established
the enterprise of mercantile reporting.

The subject of this sketch went in-
to the employ of this firm as a repor-
ter, and his abilities soon raised him
successively to the positions of mana-
ger of the Toronto and Montreal
agencies, in which capacities he ac-
quired that thorough and accurate
knowledge of the commercial affairs of
the Dominion, including a detailed in-
formation of almost every business
man from Halifax to Winnipeg, for
which he is so distinguished. Start-
ing with a great prejudice in Canada
against it, owing to its being regarded
as a sort of detective concern, the
broad and enlightened spirit with
which its designs were pursued under
Mr. Wiman's management soon render-
ed the agency one of the most popular
institutions in the mercantile world,
and soon caused it to be regarded as an
indispensable adjunct to commercial
life.

So successful was he in the manage-
ment of the Canadian branch of the
business, that he was, some twenty-
five years ago, shortly after the close
of the great American Civil War, in-
vited to the larger field of usefulness
in the commercial metropolis of Amer-
ica, to assist in the management of the
business there. His success in the
smaller sphere of action was only the
harbinger of his triumph in the greater,
for he brought to bear in his connec-
tion with the New York concern the

same industry, energy, wonderful knowledge, tact and enlightened methods that characterized his management of affairs in Canada, until an institution that was up to that time regarded with the same distrust that it had been in Canada, soon developed into the most marvellous and popular system of commercial reporting in the world. The agency, when Mr. Wiman was removed to New York, possessed only eighteen branches, whereas it now has 150, an enormous revenue, and a large army of employés. His knowledge of printing found full scope here. He soon reorganized the printing department, improved and enlarged the Reference Book, which contains the names and rating of every trader in the United States and Canada, and it soon became the best credit authority in the United States. To him more than to any other man is due that marvellous success of commercial reporting which renders it possible for every trader, no matter how remote his location, from Maine to California, from Vancouver to Halifax, to procure credit in the great centres of commerce in accordance with the resources and standing he possesses at home.

Of almost incalculable advantage to the South was this system as thus perfected. At the close of the war all industries there were necessarily in a disorganized condition, so much so that almost universal distrust of the capacity of the business men prevailed. Owing, however, to the wonderful Reference Book, information was soon disseminated relative to the deserving and reliable, confidence was quickly restored, business men obtained that credit which was so essential to their existence, and the distrusted and desolate South soon began to blossom as the rose. The book also soon became the guide, philosopher and friend, and indeed the almost indispensable auxiliary to every counting house. The success of the Mercantile Agency System is an enduring monument to

the business ability of Erastus Wiman and his associates, and alone is sufficient to satisfy the ambition of any ordinary man, for unless it had been well conducted it could easily have been the most unpopular of institutions.

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that this was his only achievement, although it is the one in which we believe he takes the most pride. Not satisfied with accomplishing, in connection with the agency, what was sufficient for the work of one life, he, almost immediately on arrival in New York, with that rapid insight into affairs that is so characteristic of him, saw what the multitude of other able financiers of that great metropolis failed to fully realize, the immense possibilities of Staten Island, which forms part of New York State, and lies six miles distant from and opposite New York, in a hollow of the coast of New Jersey. This island has been termed the Isle of Wight of America. Possessing an area of about 58 square miles, a shore capable of adding ten miles additional harborage to the port of New York, having in its north and centre lovely elevations which slope beautifully in all directions to the shore, Providence seems to have specially designed this favored place as an example of what His beneficence can accomplish for man in furnishing a spot where he could revel in luxurious delight, and which he could also turn to the most practical use. When Mr. Wiman first conceived the idea of putting to use this favored place, the beautiful uplands in its centre were almost unknown. Under his wise and skilful directions, the reputation of the island has much increased as one of the most popular resorts for recreation and amusement of the multitudes of the adjoining cities, who seek its sylvan retreats as a relief from the burdens of active business life, as well as one of the points to which is eagerly directed the attention of those men of affairs, who perceive the immense

commercial possibilities that are centred there.

One of his first and most noted achievements in this connection was the securing of a charter for the construction of a great railway bridge connecting the State of New Jersey with the island. This was accomplished against the whole force of that combative state, which did not wish to see its own water fronts depreciated in value by the presence of a competitor, combined with the enormous vested interests of the great railway corporations which had termini in that state, opposite New York city. After cyclopean efforts, he finally got the authority of Congress for its construction, and it stands to-day another monument to the ability, courage and pertinacity of this masterful man. By it, the Baltimore and Ohio and eight other trunk lines of railway are admitted to the harbor of New York making Staten Island probably the greatest future railway site in the world.

The Kill Van Kull bridge was incidental to the construction of the Rapid Transit Railroad in Staten Island, which Mr. Wiman also carried through against the immense local influence of such famous capitalists as the Vanderbilts and John H. Starin, who, as we would naturally suppose, would not care to be deprived of the monopoly they theretofore enjoyed in the ferry service between New York and the island.

The control of this ferry service was soon obtained by our Canadian friend. A direct result of the establishment of Rapid Transit and the building of the railway bridge has been to increase communication between the Island and New York city, by ferry, from 15 times per day to 58 times, to cause real estate to double in value, population to rapidly increase, the establishment of many additional manufactories, the price of products to the consumer to materially diminish, and to add a vast residential suburb to the adjoining overcrowded cities.

In the following extract from a letter recently written to Mr. Wiman, Sir Roderick Cameron, a large real estate owner there, expresses the universal sentiment respecting the value of Mr. Wiman's services to the island: "As fellow Canadians, we have differed in our political views, but there has never been an hour during the past ten years, when I have failed to appreciate what you have done for our island home. Your losses are as but a drop in the ocean compared with the enormously increased value of the island property, entirely due to your foresight and unflagging zeal. Keep up your spirits and all will be well with you."

One of Mr. Wiman's ambitions was to make the island a great centre for out-door amusements, and to this end he formed the Staten Island Amusement Company, which engaged for months the exhibition of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show on the island, and procured, at a cost of \$40,000, the celebrated Electric Fountains from England, which now form so great an attraction at the World's Fair at Chicago.

Out of the electric display grew the Richmond Light, Heat and Power Company, also promoted by Mr. Wiman, designed to supply every manufacturer and every private individual with light, heat and power, "on tap," and to render night as day, through the many miles of foliated slopes, lovely glades, and shady dells of Staten Island. It will, on completion of the pending improvements, supply not only lights, power and traction for manufactories and domestic purposes, but will also supply power to an electric railroad system our Canadian friend has planned in connection with a large land enterprise, which will thus make accessible to New Yorkers cheap homes in the romantic but almost unknown interior of the Island.

These vast undertakings in the country of his exile which have been enumerated, apparently did not mon-

opolize, much less exhaust, the energies of this truly energetic man, for we find him in 1880 and 1881 engaged in organizing and promoting the Great North-Western Telegraph Company of Canada, of which he soon became president, and he, after many years of patient, skilful and persistent negotiations against obstacles that would have appalled a man of less courage and perseverance, succeeded in leasing and practically amalgamating the old Montreal and Dominion Telegraph Companies, which were, by this act, placed on a solid financial basis, thus securing substantial dividends that are being paid, up to the present time. Not content with the performance of these labors in the commercial world, Mr. Wiman has for years accomplished in the political world what would have sufficed for the energies of any ordinary man.

Among his less prominent achievements was one dictated by that broad and disinterested philanthropy, and sympathy for human misfortunes, which have, from his earliest boyhood, been among his most happy characteristics. I refer to the Act for the abolition of imprisonment for debt, a barbarous punishment that was, until the good offices of Mr. Wiman were enlisted to secure its repeal in 1887, permitted by the highly civilized state of New York. Under the old law, men for years had languished in Ludlow-street gaol for the crime merely of being too poor to pay their debts. The movement for its repeal originated in the case of one Ross, a Canadian from Montreal, who had been incarcerated for some trifling indebtedness which was paid by Mr. Wiman, who restored him to his family on the anniversary of the evening when angels ushered into the world the message of peace and good-will towards men, with pockets filled not only to furnish his family with a Christmas dinner, but to relieve their immediate necessities as well. From Ross, Mr. Wiman heard of the five years' incarceration

for debt of another person who was, from sickness contracted in gaol, likely to die soon, unless released. This man, by the way, had a wealthy brother in Montreal, who has liberally endowed a seat of learning there, but who was apparently unmoved at the prospect of his brother pining in gaol in New York for debt. I am unable to state whether or not he endowed a Chair of the Humanities. Mr. Wiman, during the course of his investigation into this man's case, was so struck with horror at the whole situation that he determined that perpetual imprisonment for debt should be a thing of the past, and going to work with his resolute will and against great obstacles, not the least of which was the stony indifference of the public, he eventually succeeded in accomplishing his aim.

On the wall of one of the cells in the Tombs of New York are these words, written by still another man, which bear mute testimony to the constant going about doing that unostentatious good which letteth not the right hand know what the left hand doeth, that characterized all Mr. Wiman's deeds of charity: "I am to-day forty years of age, and I thought I had not a friend in the world, when Erastus Wiman sent me a Christmas dinner. I vow that before I am fifty I shall be rated in the book which this man prints worth half a million, and before I am sixty I will be rated at a million." As idle as this boast at that time no doubt appeared, it has been more than fulfilled, as one of the largest places on Broadway, owned by this man, in which he is doing annually a business of \$6,000,000, amply testifies.

A tale of absorbing interest is connected with his release from the Tombs, which was secured by Mr. Wiman, which is too lengthy to relate here. It would be a mistake to suppose that these vast schemes, so scantily outlined, were the limit of Mr. Wiman's achievements. His essays in

political, literary and social spheres during the time he was engaged in promoting these great enterprises, were characterized by the same boldness, energy and comprehensiveness that were the main features of his financial achievements. His mind was probably the first to conceive the vast scheme of joining in commercial union the two vast territories that compose almost this entire continent. His public meeting at Dufferin Lake, in the summer of 1887, inaugurated the movement, in which his heart is still so engaged, and which soon became the battle cry of one of the great political parties of Canada, under the name of unrestricted reciprocity. So engrossed in the desire to benefit his native country was he that he took no less than twenty-five trips to Washington on behalf of this movement, and after a large expenditure of time, money and energy, procured the Committee on Foreign Relations of the House of Representatives to give it the stamp of its approval in the famous "Hitt resolution." His refusal to renounce allegiance to the land of his birth and to take the oath of allegiance to the government of the United States has entailed on him very great inconveniences, among which are a foreigner's inability to hold real estate in his own name, or any title whatever in coasting vessels, in some of which he was largely interested, or to become a director in any banking institution, in one of which he was a large stockholder. This stand taken by him is an unobtrusive testimony to a genuine sentiment of loyalty that breathed in him, and is in striking contrast to the noisy demonstrations of many of his opponents in Canada, who bandy about, without much reference to its meaning, this much abused and misconstrued word.

Among the large number of pamphlets he has published, the vast number of addresses he has delivered, and letters to the press he has written on political, social and scientific subjects,

are many that deal with this question of commercial union between Canada and the United States. No less than twenty-five articles of his grace the North American and Contemporary Reviews. He received requests to contribute no less than three different articles within five months to the same magazine. His public addresses have been delivered in nearly every city of the Union, and in all the cities of Canada except Hamilton. They have been delivered before the most noted commercial, scientific, educational and literary institutions in the United States. That he has been a powerful agent in the formation and controlling of thought on this continent scarcely any one will undertake to deny.

When we consider the work of this one man, we wonder what limit there is to human endurance, and naturally feel a desire to account for his ability to accomplish so much. That he must be a man of unusual ability, industry and energy goes without saying. Retiring at nine thirty, p.m. and rising at three or four a.m., he has thus been able to perform an amount of literary labor that would have been impossible, in view of his other engagements, without utilizing these early hours, most of his literary work having been done between these latter hours and seven a.m. He was always, when in the city, to be found at his office between nine a.m. and five p.m., after which his well known form could be seen pacing the deck of the ferry which carried him to his happy home in Staten Island, where he reigned as the idol with no rival, and where he usually spent his evenings reading aloud the popular authors to a charmed family circle. In this home, as well as in the city, he also dispensed the most generous hospitality. This extended not only to his private friends, but to the persons composing such important bodies as the Pan-American Congress, the Iron and Steel Institute of Great Britain, the President and

Executive of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and other guests by the hundred.

To his other personal characteristics must be added a vivacity of intellect, a grand physique that has never been enervated by the use of tobacco or the excessive use of ardent liquors, methodical habits, dogged perseverance, a mounting ambition, and, above all, a light-hearted and cheery disposition which, during his whole career, from the time he was a barefooted boy earning fifty cents per week, to the time he became one of the most noted men of North America, has served him so well. Added to this, the springs of human sympathy and philanthropy were ever active within him, thus keeping fresh and green the moral constitution, which seems to react upon and keep healthy the physical, the drying up of which in any one is not favorable to longevity. It is almost incredible to a stranger viewing Mr. Wiman's freshness and vigor, that he is within ten years of fulfilling the sphere of life allotted by the Psalmist to man.

A short enumeration of his benevolent and charitable acts would fill a goodly sized volume. Among the objects of his cheerful support are his first school mistress, aged unmarried spinsters, widows, old men and distant relatives, who have up to the time of the present embarrassment in his finances been the regular monthly recipients of his bounty.

The offices in Montreal and Toronto of the agency with which he has so many years been identified were the centres in Canada from which these donations so freely flowed. No less a sum than \$50,000 has, in the opinion of those best capable of judging, been given by him within the last fifteen years to these objects of his fond solicitude in Canada. If this large sum represents his gifts in Canada, what must be the sum that represents like donations in the United States where the field and demand for them were greater. If, as Burke says, "Men are

ruined on the side of their natural propensities," we have in these charitable gifts the secret of Mr. Wiman's present financial embarrassment. Nothing is clearer to his most intimate friends than that if he had buttoned up his pockets to all cries for aid, the money thus saved, utilized as he so well knew how to utilize it, would have prevented his present temporary embarrassment. Many Canadians in the United States have especial reason to gratefully remember him. Scattered all over the Union from Maine to California are thousands who owe their present prosperity in life to the impulse of his sound and friendly advice and financial aid. His home and office in New York were the Meccas to which all Canadians, from the most prominent and cultured to the most ignorant settler, turned for recreation or help, and none of them went disappointed away. Especially was he solicitous of the welfare of the newsboys and telegraph operators, in whom, owing to his former connection with those callings, he felt a most active sympathy.

An indication of the hold he has gained on the hearts and imagination of the operators is furnished by an incident that occurred at a banquet given by the Magnetic Club in New York, where the chairman, upon introducing Mr. Wiman, said:—"He is the only director on a list of thirty millionaires composing the board, whom any one of the sixty thousand operators would approach with a certainty of borrowing a ten dollar bill."

In view of all these achievements, were the brittle thread which binds him to this life to be now snapped, could any one assert with truth that his life had not been a grand success.

Has it been any the less so because he has probably still twenty years, with all his accumulated experience, his ardor and energy undiminished, within which to recover from his present misfortune? All persons, however much they differ in opinion from Mr. Wiman on various topics, it is believed can join

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in the heartfelt wishes of Mr. Bayard, ex-Secretary of State for the United States, and at present American Minister to the Court of St. James, who a few weeks ago thus wrote :

"DEAR MR. WIMAN :—

"The time draws near for my departure for my new scene of duty, but I am not willing to go without an expression of my sincere and hearty sympathy for the financial embarrassment which has come upon you. I cannot doubt but that the same foresight, energy, enterprise and integrity upon which your success has heretofore been builded up, will, in due time, re-

construct your fortunes, and leave you in that condition which you have so well earned and which, I sincerely hope, you may soon regain.

"Wishing you every good fortune, I am most truly and respectfully yours,

"T. F. BAYARD."

Such words, from such a man, the most representative of all the public men in the United States, fittingly close this tribute to Canada's friend in the United States, as indicating the esteem in which he is held in the country of his adoption, and the influence he wields for the benefit of the country of his birth.

